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of rooting out terrorism immediately following ("forming decades of deep structure"). But as that language overlaps with the language of alternative medicine, the military commercialism is then compared with pseudoscience in which 'like cures like' ("for the love of homeopathy"); & we end up with a hanging statement of seemingly innocuous acknowledgement of absurdity, though actually a dark irony: "that's funny, isn't it."

I realise it is tenuous to present this reading as linear narrative, & De'Ath's poetic method is not so overdetermined. She's writing, it seems to me, quickly, & my subjective anatomisation of her poem is bound to result in a few conjectures wildly off the mark. But I think it can be useful in at least positing the range of themes at work in even a short piece by De'Ath, a piece that might at first glance seem worth only hasty attention. I'd highly recommend De'Ath's pamphlet *Caribou*, published by Bad Press, for a read of a longer sequence of poems thematically overlapped & more brilliant than I have words for. Evidently.

J.H. Prynne's contribution, an extemporised comment on Peter Larkin made at the conclusion of one of Larkin's rare poetry readings, speaks for itself & provides its own references, so I won't trouble the reader any further with my persiflage. I'm also going to leave you to sort through Simon Jarvis's contribution—though I have my own rather different impressions of the Katko, Sutherland & Thornton volumes under review, I'd have to be a fanatic to take this moment to unleash those opinions upon you for the inauspicious occasion of criticising a critic.

The last grumble I would muster for a roundup of *No Prizes* is, why aren't Ian Heames's own poems included? He's an excellent poet—check out one of his latest, published by Brighton's brilliant Iodine Press, as well as the previous pamphlets from Critical Documents & ©_©/Face Press [available from me Stateside! ORDER NOW! While Supplies Last!!!!]—& I think it's DUMB that he doesn't include himself in his own mag. This is no time for humility! This is all-out fucking WAR, poets!

[Cover]

by Amy Todman (Brae Editions, 2014)

Reviewed by Greg Thomas

Lots of innovative small press poetry in Scotland since the 1960s can be distinguished by an unabashed emphasis on the beauty of the book as visual and physical object, often minimalist in orientation; and by a corollary smallness of thematic scope, an unqualified concern with personal feeling, affection and aesthetic experience, often involving an interaction with nature. These qualities might be met with assumptions of sentimentality, even antagonism, within milieus which stake the value of poetry on its social or political efficacy, but this critique seems insufficiently mindful of this work's distinct aesthetic heritage.

Of course, that heritage has a lot to do with Ian Hamilton Finlay's Wild Hawthorn Press and journal *Poor.Old.Tired.Horse* (1962-67), whose self-professed and avowedly "unfashionable" concern with "beauty" has been enduringly influential on the Scottish poetry scene. To extrapolate slightly, in one sense this tradition is rooted in the intimist, ascetic strand of concrete poetry which took hold across parts of Northern Europe in the 1950s-60s. Beyond that, the idea of physical and temporal locatedness which comes across in the careful placement of words on the page, and the investment in personal aesthetic and emotional insight, follows a certain strand of American modernism, often regionally or rurally located, hyper-sensitised to the minutiae of quotidian experience: the Williams-Olson-Creeley-Niedecker line, whose influence stretched across the channel at mid-century through the work of regional British modernists like Roy Fisher and Finlay himself. The word "experience" also seems loaded here. The principle underpinning this American tradition—faith in the organs of subjective perception as a means of inducing universal concepts, so different from the sense of the subject's mediation by insidious social forces which holds sway in lots of British innovative poetics—may partly be an Emersonian one.

I'm not going to adjudicate on the parenthesised dispute here, simply note that this nexus of influences seems to have contributed to the development of an extant and feasibly "avant-garde" tradition, roughly centred on Scotland, whose position of advancement is defined in terms of a certain refinement of aesthetic sensibility rather than an animus of social dissent. The presses which I'm taking to embody this tradition—Tarasque and its offshoots (admittedly not based in Scotland), Moschatel, Morning, Brae, Sine Wave Peak—have generally developed out of some innervating engagement with Finlay's work. Brae's founding editor Alistair Peebles is a Finlay scholar as well as a poet, and the Orkney-based press's publication roster suggests, in part, a fidelity to that concrete idiom mentioned above.

This brings me on to Amy Todman's *[Cover]*. In some ways this text stands clear of the foregoing discussion, partly because, although Todman is a poet amongst other things, *[Cover]* seems more like a work of experimental prose, almost Oulipian in its application of formal restraints. However, it certainly fulfils the two characteristics mentioned at the start of the review, in the simple yet meticulously realised beauty of its design, and in its [concealed] documentation of a personal emotional process, specifically the grieving preceding and following the death of the author's father. The dust-jacket is instructive here:

> What follows is an attempt to describe a particular period of time.
> It spans several years in the life of a woman, during which her fa-

ther was diagnosed with and died from cancer of the prostate and bone.

The text documents this death indirectly, by telling the tale of its own making: the story of a series of interactions between "a woman," *B*, identifiable as the author, and various other anonymous, alphabetised individuals, two of whom are obviously her parents, *E* and *F*. *B* is making objects for these people, and asking them to draw those objects, as well as sending her passages of text that have "inspired them in some way." To return to the cover for an explanation, "[t]his was not art or therapy but nevertheless became a way of understanding myself again as a human being and as an artist."

These drawings and writing fragments are reproduced at regular points throughout the text, so the story is punctuated by what initially seem obscure fragments of visual and linguistic bricolage, whose sense is gradually revealed as the text drops hints about its own composition. In this incremental revelation of its own logic, the narrative gradually stitches together a cover for itself - or removes one. But the title's most obvious connotation is a literal one, a reference to the first 'object,' whose making is recounted in two introductory paragraphs: '[o]n the island of Hoy, to the West of Orkney, a woman sat one evening in the common room of the outdoor centre, sewing a cover for a stone.'

The text's formal qualities are exemplified in the next passage of narrative, which tracks the progress of that first object:

A sees an object that B has made and given to C

A asks B to make a similar object for D

B says she will try but that it may not be exactly the same

A says that it is even better.[23]

Although I've said this isn't poetry, the becalming of lines at isolated points on the page, and the reductive syntax—which, interestingly, becomes more intricate as the narrative progresses—clearly make sense in a post-concrete context. However, that reductive impulse, and the cloaking of names in alphabetic ciphers, also seem a means of emotional sequestering, a protective cover for the author whose life the narrative would otherwise unveil. The text avails us with hints to this effect later on:

B is not sure what this will all become; in her mind it takes the form of a book and she wonders if she should ask someone to help

23. Text un-paginated; no further citations provided for quotes.

B discusses what she is doing with O

B has not known O for that long so she is a little unsure how to talk about it with her

O is interested and makes helpful comments prompting a discussion of the question of being present or emotional in writing rather than more distanced

[…]

The next time B reads through this writing she considers the issue of presence

In this case B thinks that the distance in the work is to do with a distance that she needed to create around strong feelings

The shrouding of identity then, partly indicates a recoiling from emotions whose strength the author is afraid of, or which may seem embarrassing, to the extent that this ongoing process might eventually underpin a piece of literature. Indeed, it's interesting that the only "poem" in the book, other than a fragment on the cover—*[Cover]*'s cover contains lots of its most revealing admissions—appears in the context of this protective manoeuvre, presented, moreover, as the author's own piece of "quoted" text:

we ate and then he looked
right at me

the colours on your shirt are beautiful

he wet his lips many times
that last night

It's a sweet poem about *F*'s "last night," but might have seemed vulnerable to charges of sentimentality, were cover not provided by these self-distancing devices.

My reading of those devices doesn't quite penetrate all the text's layers, however. The whimsical tension of the narrative, that is, surely derives from the fact that the abstraction, the self-protection, seems so cursory, and so counterbalanced by psychological detail. Other than the simple act of concealing names with letters, the text is actually highly revealing about the thoughts and actions of the author and her companions, and

the various discontinuous, overlapping threads of her social circle and life's story. This is not, as the reductive act of encoding might suggest, a universal narrative of an individual dealing with death, its details hewn down to some Platonic form of universal relatability. The accidents and details of a *particular* life, a particular set of relationships and events, remain visible through the veil of abstraction.

How, then, can the text's formal constraints create 'a distance around strong feelings' which could be troubling or embarrassing when the narrative remains such a precise document of the author's emotional life? (Remember, the alphabetic disguise doesn't protect *B*: we know who *B* is.) Perhaps what is really at stake in the encoding of names is not so much self-protection, or an attempt to cool the authorial tone, as a desire to make the arbitrary-seeming details of that life bear some broad, abstract significance, which would serve as a memorial or homage to the lost loved one: a way of making their life, and the reaction to their death, seem to have mattered in some way. A similar effect seems at stake in the headings of the book's four sections, which enumerate the ideas and themes negotiated in each, for example:

> Part III
>
> The forgotten object; what to do with the object; a death;
> meaning; faith; how to finish

The seesawing between grand concepts—'meaning,' 'faith'—and small details—'what to do with the object'—again seems like an attempt to make the small details bear some universal value. But the gentle irony of that contrast—the fact that the particulars seem so *particular* in this context, so insignificant in a sense, when set against the list of big words and themes—makes the attempt seem rather self-conscious and plaintive. This is not the confidence in the significance of individual experience of Williams's 'so much depends| upon | a red wheel | barrow,' but a more mannered and doubtful hope that something might depend on an individual experience of loss.

Another point of divergence with the Williams model of individual experience is the book's evidently collaborative status: its shaping by the creative and emotional input of friends and family. The prefixed Louise Bourgeois quote, '[e]verything comes to you from the other,' gets the sentiment across, as does the content, and the mere presence, of the collaborators' passages of text. Those passages bind together sources as diverse as A.A. Milne and Donne, often through a focus on the importance of society, as in *J*'s chosen passage:

> No Man is an *Iland*, intire of it selfe: every man is a peece of the
> *Continent*, a part of the *maine*; if a *Clod* bee washed away by the
> *Sea*, *Europe* is the lesse, as well as if a *Promontorie* were, as well as if
> a *Mannor* of thy friends, or of *thine owne*, were.

This may be tenuous, but I feel like there's the germ of a useful corrective here to the more solipsistic tendencies of that Scottish minimalist tradition I mentioned earlier: its preoccupation with the figure of the isolated poet, sequestered in his farmstead or bothy, enraptured by wild flowers. Todman's book is initially set on Orkney, an isolated rural location, but is clearly the product of a busy and involved community: "the object is a product of the people and | interactions that touched her in its making."

To return to the title-word then, 'cover' is also something that other people can provide for you, in dangerous or threatening situations. But perhaps the title unfolds its final meaning over two double-page spreads which negotiate the death around which the narrative is shaped. The first contains one of the painted images of the objects made by *B*, accompanied by a single sentence: 'F has died.' The following double-page mimics a layout with which the reader has acquainted themselves by this point: on the verso, the codename of a contributor is printed, followed by the title of their chosen passage of text; on the recto, the text itself appears. But all we are faced with here is the solitary letter *F* at the top of the left-hand page: no title, no quote. This is not a blank space, but a ghostly echo of that established format, the subtext conveyed with wonderful litheness: *F* has died before he could give *B* his passage of text.

Beyond its documentation of the narrative's central event, there's something in this white space—a page of missing text rather than just a blank page—which cuts to the core of the book's symbolic world. A 'cover' is not just something to be wrapped around something else, but something which can conceal the absence of something else. The narrative, in part, documents a series of actions taken to *avoid* writing about *F*'s death, an as yet unassimilable loss. The book is a cover for a set of poems which the author couldn't write: an empty shell. Indeed, my only criticism of this sad and moving work is a re-framing of that final observation: that it seems more like an adumbration of a practice than a document of that practice itself. For this reason, I'd like to see *[Cover]* followed up by a similarly finely executed collection of poems.